



Energy and Driving

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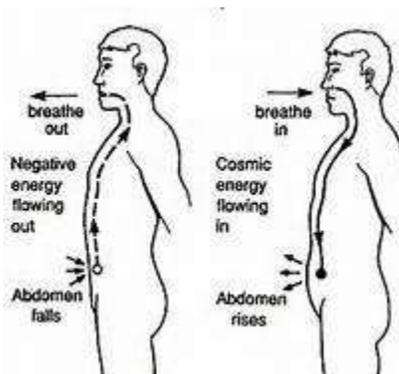
I'd like to write a little about energy and how it affects your driving whether at a show or parade or just plain anywhere! I am speaking from experience about this as I have always been a type A personality and have had to work hard throughout the years to achieve a calm/assertive demeanor when driving. I have not always been successful at it but try to bring awareness into it at all times.

Sometime when you go to a show or even when you are around people and their horses/mules watch and listen to the various people and how they interact with their animals. What happens with the horses when the handler is loud and has quick jerky hand movements? What about when the handler is quiet and smooth? Your horses and mules are quite in tune to your energy and respond in kind.

Watch someone like Bob Tomaskie or Rob Henrekin during the log pull event. They do not raise their voices and they navigate the course smoothly. It's not that they have the best horses or mules; it is that they keep their voices calm and their hands are not jerking on the lines confusing the animals. Remember it is accuracy before speed! You will never get the speed if you don't first work on your accuracy.

To get the best out of driving horses and mules your energy needs to be "calm/assertive" as dog trainer Caesar Milan would say when training his dogs. If your energy is "up" and you are excited and over driving your horse or mule through a timed obstacle course your animals are picking up on that energy and drive accordingly. How many times have you seen or heard someone hollering loudly "WHOA, WHOA!! GEE, GET UP THERE!!" (maybe you have been there yourself). Along with the quick jerky movements of their hands on the lines it is a wonder the

animal goes at all. Thankfully a lot of our horses and mules have a forgiving nature and when the driver finally “gets it” their ani-mals improve.



How do you bring your energy down if you are excited? It's called breathing! Taking a few deep breaths in through your nose and letting them out through your mouth goes a long way in achieving this. Do not focus on the class! Focus on your breathing! What to do if you get in your class and your energy becomes nervous and excited? Just BREATHE!

I once had a mule that I trained to drive at the age of 10 so that I could enter in the Ride and Drive class at Mule Days in Bishop, CA. She had a problem of not standing when you halted in the lineup or for that matter anywhere else. I worked and worked on the problem before going to Bishop that spring. When on the rail in the driving part of the class we were asked to just stop our mules and stand on the rail. I halted her and started with deep breathing along with imagining my energy in my body dropping down into the ground. Amazingly she stood for the long length of time needed before we were asked to move on. She got 3rd in a class of 47 animals!

Your energy has a lot to do with those hands on the lines too! If you are nervous your hands do not have the elasticity needed to communicate through the lines to the bit in your horses or mules mouth.

One last thing, know your class pattern! Memorizing the pattern of the class you are entering in before you go into the class will go a long way in helping you stay calm. DO NOT learn the pattern from watching another entry go, they might not do it right! Memorize it from the sheet given to you and close your eyes and drive it in your mind before the class as many times as it takes. It works! Even for something as simple as the log pulling class. If you ever decided to compete in combined driving you would have to memorize as many as 7 obstacles over a possible 15 mile course. That's a lot of memorizing!